

WSDOT Public Transportation and Rail Division Monthly Report

July 2005

The WSDOT Public Transportation and Rail Division Monthly Report highlights the division's progress and milestones reached in these areas:

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-

Division News

New OTM Advisory Groups Formed

The Division recently formed two advisory bodies to support the department's new Office of Transit Mobility: 1) an advisory committee to offer recommendations for the development of the new program, 2) a grant technical work group to provide technical support in the development of the Regional Mobility Grant Program.

The primary goals of the office are to 1) facilitate connection and coordination of transit services and planning, and 2) maximize opportunities to use public transportation to improve efficiency of transportation corridors. The office will also develop a statewide strategic plan that creates common goals for transit agencies and reduces competing plans for cross-jurisdictional service and a park and ride lot program.

The advisory committee and grant technical work group, comprised of representatives from transit agencies, cities, counties, Regional Transportation Planning Organizations, and the Commute Trip Reduction Task Force will begin meeting in July. For information on the meeting dates and location, please see the upcoming events section of this newsletter. The committee meetings are open to the public and meeting reports will be available on WSDOT's Web site at http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/transit/otm_materials.cfm

Public Transportation

Asotin County Transit's Comprehensive Plan Approved



On June 14, the Washington State Transportation Commission, as required by state law, approved the initial comprehensive plan for the Asotin County Public Transportation Benefit Area (PTBA).

In 2004, after Asotin County expressed an interest in creating a Public Transportation Benefit Area (PTBA), WSDOT helped the county prepare a comprehensive service plan. Asotin County funded its work on the plan with a technical assistance grant from the Community Transportation Association of America.



Asotin County Transit contracts with Valley Transit of Lewiston, Idaho.

On November 2, 2004, voters approved a 0.2 percent sales and use tax for the Asotin County PTBA, making Asotin County Transit Washington's 27th official transit system.

WSDOT's Grant Management Training Draws 45 Attendees

In June, WSDOT hosted grant management training for recipients of 2005-2007 public transportation grants. The all-day training sessions were offered in Olympia and SeaTac and were attended by 45 grant managers. The training helps grantees understand and comply with the laws and regulations associated with state and Federal Transit Administration funding.

Based on the evaluations received, participants found the training helpful, particularly in the following areas:

- Vehicle purchasing
- Invoicing and reimbursements
- Written course materials

WSDOT will host grant management training in Spokane on July 13 and in Yakima on July 14. To register, please contact Steinun Priem at (360) 705-7922 or priems@wsdot.wa.gov.



Transit Systems Propose Projects for ParaTransit/Special Needs Grants

WSDOT is working with transit systems to develop project proposals and contracts for ParaTransit/Special Needs Grants for 2005–2007. The grants will be supported by \$19.5 million in funding: \$15.6 million made possible by the 2003 Legislative Transportation Funding Package, augmented by \$3.9 million from the 2005 Transportation Partnership Package. Examples of projects include:

- Adding service hours on evenings and weekends
- Purchasing buses and vans
- Providing travel training and call center support for riders
- Expanding route deviated and demand response services
- Implementing automated dispatching equipment

A list showing the funding budgeted for each transit system, is located at http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/transit/grants/2005-07_transit_system_grants.cfm

Transportation Commission Certified Transit Asset Management Plans



On June 14, the Washington State Transportation Commission unanimously passed a resolution certifying Asset Management Plans for 27 transit systems. WSDOT mailed each transit system a copy of the resolution and a certificate of compliance.

Based on 2003 legislation, as a condition of receiving state funding, each transit system must develop a plan for managing its assets and have the plan certified by the Transportation Commission. WSDOT staff reviewed the 27 plans, worked with each agency to resolve any issues, and presented the plans to the Transportation Commission.

Every two years, at the beginning of each state funding cycle, transit systems must self-certify their ongoing compliance with the regulations and provide WSDOT with any updates to their transit asset management plans.

WSDOT Gears Up for Public Transportation Conference

Staff has been busy planning for WSDOT's 29th Annual Public Transportation Conference in SeaTac, August 22–24, 2005. Over 50 workshops, the Recognition and Awards Banquet, exhibitor show, and much more will be squeezed into three exciting days. New this year, the conference will include the “Rail Buffet Tour,” a guided tour of three rail systems in one evening!

Keynote speakers at the conference will be Alan E. Pisarski, author of the “Commuting in America” series, and Bob Drewell, Executive Director of the Puget Sound Regional Council, former Snohomish County Executive, and former chairman of Sound Transit. Senator Mary Margaret Haugen and Representative Ed Murray will also be present to address conference attendees at the Opening Lunch. To see the Program-at-a-Glance and to learn more about the conference, please visit the conference website at <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/transit/conference>.

FTA Audits Drug and Alcohol Testing in Washington

On June 20–23, a consultant team hired by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) audited WSDOT's Drug and Alcohol Testing Program for recipients of federal public transportation grants. Five grantees were selected to participate in the audit: an intercity provider, a non-profit, and three transit agencies. Although FTA found WSDOT's program management and oversight to be in compliance, there were some findings with grant recipients, most of them related to minor policy issues and errors made at collection sites. WSDOT was given 90 days to provide documentation that all of the findings have been corrected.

To help all grantees comply with federal drug and alcohol testing, WSDOT will provide two workshops at the Public Transportation Conference in August. In one workshop, a panel of grantees will share lessons learned from the FTA audit. The other workshop will provide training to grantees on conducting their tests as well as their own audits of collection facilities. WSDOT will also schedule additional training for those unable to attend the conference.

Agency Council on Coordinated Transportation

Marcy Jaffe Returns to WSDOT to Work on the Statewide Trip Planner



Marcy Jaffe rejoins the division as Outreach Liaison for the Agency Council for Coordinated Transportation (ACCT). Marcy worked briefly for WSDOT in 1999 after managing one of the initial demonstration projects for ACCT. It was Marcy who first identified the critical need for a dynamic, web-based travel tool. She sought out a partnership with the Oregon State Department of Transportation to create a bi-state trip planner, a project now led by Robin Phillips, WSDOT's ACCT Administrator. Marcy is back with WSDOT on a temporary assignment to help implement the project. She will spend most of her time on the road meeting with transportation providers to secure data-sharing agreements. Marcy can be reached at jaffem@wsdot.wa.gov or (360) 705-7923.

Coordination Meeting Held for Transportation Providers in the South Puget Sound

To help coordinate special needs transportation services in Thurston, Pierce, and Lewis Counties, ACCT organized a meeting on June 23 that brought together regional transportation providers. Representatives from the Thurston Regional Planning Council, Transpro, Pierce Community Action Council, Yelm Community Service, and White Pass Community Services attended the initial meeting. The meeting gave participants an overview of local services, current overlaps in service, and opportunities to coordinate schedules and service.

Other transportation providers will be invited to future meetings including Pierce Transit, Intercity Transit, Twin Transit, and Lower Columbia Action Council. For more information or to schedule a coordination meeting in your region, please contact Don Chartock, WSDOT Mobility Coordinator, at charted@wsdot.wa.gov or (360) 705-7928.

Passenger and Freight Rail

Schools on Trains ends for 2004–2005 season

The 2004–2005 Schools on Trains program ended on June 9. Sponsored by WSDOT and Amtrak *Cascades*, it gave school-age youth the opportunity to experience train travel aboard Amtrak *Cascades*.

During this past school year, 6,654 participants from 140 schools experienced train travel aboard Amtrak *Cascades*. Participants commented that they enjoyed the train experience, appreciated the low fare and wanted the program to continue. The top three origin points, where schools started their trips were: Bellingham, Vancouver, and Olympia. The top three destination cities were: Seattle, Portland, and Tacoma.



The program is transferring the coordination and processing of reservations to Amtrak's Group Reservations desk by August. The WSDOT Rail Office will continue to market the program, which will now be known as Amtrak *Cascades* Schools on Trains. In early August, Amtrak will begin taking reservations for the 2005–2006 school year at <http://www.amtrakcascades.com>.

High-Speed Crossovers Completed in Tacoma

Until recently, passenger trains could be delayed as long as 15 minutes while they waited for freight trains to pass in this area, south of the Tacoma Narrows Bridge. A new set of crossover tracks at Titlow allow faster Amtrak trains to move around slower freight trains at speeds up to 60 mph. A crossover is a set of turnouts connecting multiple tracks. They allow trains to move from one track to another.



The project was completed in June 2005. The project cost \$3.97 million, funded by the 2003 Legislative Transportation Package.

Crews work to stabilize a hillside next to the new crossover tracks at Titlow Park in Tacoma

Commute Trip Reduction/Transportation Demand Management

CTR Task Force Discusses Changes to Program

The Commute Trip Reduction Task Force continues to discuss possible changes to the program. Its program redesign and evaluation committee has been meeting weekly to examine the program's scope, structure, administration, governance, and funding. The committee's previous recommendations to the Task Force include continuing the program and using morning congestion as an indicator for which areas of the state should be affected.

The committee brought more recommendations to the Task Force on June 24:

- Adopt a two-tiered program with a base program affecting urban growth areas and a targeted investment program for designated urban centers or the local equivalent.
- Require regional transportation planning organizations (RTPOs) to create a regional CTR implementation plan in consultation with local jurisdictions.
- Set a statewide commute trip reduction goal with base funding and enable RTPOs to establish more aggressive goals and receive additional funding.

The Task Force approved the general direction of these recommendations and directed that the committee further develop the recommendations.

A web page with all of the redesign materials discussed at the Task Force meetings can be found at <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/tdm/taskforce/tfmaterials.cfm>. In September the Task Force will consider all of the program changes and approve its redesign recommendations for consideration by the legislature.

Review of CTR Performance Grant Program

WSDOT has asked Task Force members and prior grant recipients to serve in a workgroup to develop improvements to the CTR Performance Grant program. Based on a report from a University of Washington research team, areas for improvement include:

- Redesigning the program to attract entrepreneurs and encourage them to create cost-effective trip reduction services
- Revising the administrative rules that govern the program (Washington Administrative Code) to better communicate its intent
- Clarifying coordination between local and regional efforts
- Clarifying requirements for program measurement
- Communicating consistently about the program

Committee findings will be presented to the Task Force for decisions prior to the next call for performance grant applications in September or October.

Vanpool Ridership Update

For the period July 2003 through April 2005, vanpools on Washington State roads increased by 12 percent to 1,772 vehicles while vanpools riders statewide increased by 13 percent to 14,389 daily riders.

WSDOT staff and the Statewide Vanpool Team expect vanpooling to continue growing as transit operators put 104 new vans into service in coming weeks and as commuters learn that cash incentives for vanpooling are available at <http://www.rideshareonline.com>. The incentives—in the form of MasterCard gift cards—reward commuters for becoming vanpool riders, drivers, or bookkeepers, or for referrals.



Upcoming Events

OTM Advisory Committee Meetings

July 14, August 5, August 19, September 2, October 14, November 4, November 18, November 30
9:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.

WSDOT Urban Corridors Office, 401 2nd Avenue South, Suite 300
Seattle, Washington

For more information, contact Theresa Smith at smithtl@wsdot.wa.gov or (206) 464-1282.

OTM Grant Technical Work Group Meetings

July 19, August 9, August 16, September 2, October 11, November 8, November 15
9:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.

WSDOT Urban Corridors Office, 401 2nd Avenue South, Suite 300
Seattle, Washington

For more information, contact Theresa Smith at smithtl@wsdot.wa.gov or (206) 464-1282.

Agency Council on Coordinated Transportation

August 5, October 7, December 2
9:30 a.m.–12:00 p.m.

To confirm times and locations, visit: http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/acct/acct_meetings.htm

CTR Task Force Meetings

July 22 and August 26

11:00 a.m.–2:00 p.m., followed by subcommittee meetings. To confirm times and locations, contact Shelley Pedro at pedros@wsdot.wa.gov or (360) 705-7846.

Association of Travel Instruction (ATI) Conference

Friday, August 12–Sunday, August 14, 2005

Seattle, Washington

For more information, visit: <http://www.travelinstruction.org>

29th Annual Washington State Public Transportation Conference

Monday, August 22–Wednesday, August 24, 2005

Double Tree Hotel Seattle Airport

SeaTac, Washington

For more information, visit: <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/transit/conference>

The WSDOT Public Transportation and Rail Division prepares this monthly newsletter as a service to those interested in the activities of the division and its partners within the agency. To receive your own copy via e-mail or for questions regarding newsletter articles, please contact Tonia Buell, communications manager, at buellt@wsdot.wa.gov or 360-705-7439.